

TALKING POINTS

1998 ALASKAN SALMON DISASTER DECLARATION

Issue: The declaration of commercial fishery failure due to a salmon fishery resource disaster in the Alaskan Bristol Bay/Kuskokwin/Yukon salmon fisheries.

Background: In November of 1997, at the request of Governor Knowles, DOC announced a fishery failure in the 1997 Bristol Bay/Kuskokwin salmon fisheries. Congress later appropriated \$7.0 million in disaster assistance to DOC and you awarded a grant to the state of Alaska in April of 1998 for \$9.33 million (the total included \$2.33 from the state to fulfill their 25 percent matching requirement).

On August 13, 1998 you received a letter from Gov. Knowles requesting a Magnuson-Stevens Act section 312(a) disaster declaration for the Bristol Bay/Kuskokwin and Yukon salmon fisheries for the 1998 fishing season. The Governor's letter cites data that the sockeye, chum and king salmon runs projected for the three areas were 73 percent below the long-term average.

- Bristol Bay-sockeye catch (9.9 million fish) was less than half the forecasted
- Kuskokwin River-chum catch (180,000 fish) was 60% less than forecasted
- Yukon River-king catch (43,000 fish) is believed to be the lowest this century

Talking Points:

- On August 20th I visited the Bristol Bay/Kuskokwin region and promised that I would respond quickly to the request for a disaster declaration. I'm fulfilling that promise today.
- I want to tell you that the National Marine Fisheries Service has completed its review of the situation and has concluded that there has been a commercial salmon fishery failure due to natural events, possibly linked to changes in ocean conditions associated with the extended El Nino event we've been experiencing.
- This call is to notify you that today I will be announcing my declaration of a commercial fishery failure in the Bristol Bay/Kuskokwin and Yukon salmon fisheries, as requested by Gov. Knowles in his August 13th letter.
- Having visited the region and seen first hand the impact last year's salmon disaster has caused those communities and fishermen who are so isolated and dependent on these stocks, I understand the extent of the extraordinary hardships these people are enduring and their need for assistance.
- I look forward to working with both you and [Sen. Stevens/Gov. Knowles] as we move forward to address the immediate impacts of this fishery disaster, as well as developing a long-term strategy to address the underlying problems that are contributing to the difficulties faced by the residents of this region.
- Any funds to address this disaster will have to be appropriated by Congress for this purpose.